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Egyptian-Israeli Joint Science Progress Told to House Panel

By LOU FINTOR, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—Egyptian and Israeli scientists, hailing what they called an "unprecedented cooperative" program sponsored by the United States, told a House panel Tuesday of successful joint efforts to tackle health, environmental and agricultural problems that have plagued the Mideast.

With project grants from the U.S. Agency for International Development, researchers from the two nations were able to develop a rapid test for malaria and a protein-rich edible desert shrub, the scientists said.

In addition, they discovered ways to breed heartier species of goat and fish, battle coastal erosion and eradicate leishmaniasis—a parasitic skin infection transmitted by the sand fly.

"The program has proved itself a remarkable success, both in terms of the tangible scientific gains . . . and the familiarity and trust it has built among the Israelis and Egyptians that have taken part," said California Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles), whose legislation established the program in 1979.

Coinciding with the congressional hearing was the end of a three-day conference by the scientists, which marked the first time that all the researchers in the program had gathered in one place.

The scientists, exchanging gifts and embraces, vowed to "strengthen and support this bridge to peace" by expanding programs that would stress community participation.

However, in spite of the public displays of good will, the program was not without criticism. Program participant Mohammed Darwashi, an Arab from Israel, noted the lack of Arab researchers from his nation.

"This group has totally ignored well-qualified Israeli Arabs," he said. "This whole thing is going on as if it is some kind of underground activity."

Darwashi, an aide to the only Arab member of the Israeli Parliament, just completed a nationwide lecture tour sponsored by the Progressive Zionist Caucus, a New York-based organization that seeks to foster better relations between Israel's Arab and Jewish residents.

"We don't want to step on anybody's toes. We just want more feet in the program," he said. "The problem back home is between people, not between scientists."

During Tuesday's hearing, the scientists sought to deflect congressional criticism aimed at reducing the project's budget. The program, which has brought together more than 1,000 researchers since it was begun seven years ago, initially had requested a budget allocation of \$5.8 million.

But, because of spending reductions under the Gramm-Rudman deficit-cutting law, AID officials this year eliminated a \$600,000 agricultural exchange program and a \$100,000 small-grant project that funded small, short-term projects approved by the Israeli and Egyptian embassies.